

# What, Me Worry?

## *Let immigrants keep coming in whatever numbers*

Book review by Edward Levy

The regard of Joel Millman for immigration clearly derives from the teachings of the Julian Simon/Alfred E. Newman School of Economics and Mental health — ignore everything that might make you feel bad. For example, he immediately (p.vi) declines any discussion of the crucial issues of macroeconomics, thereby adroitly avoiding consideration of all large-scale and long-term economic effects of immigration. And a bit later (p.48) he nonchalantly dismisses the "softer, New Age view that deals in other fears: overpopulation, environmental destruction, the 'widening gap between rich and poor'" with the logic that: "Fortunately, none of these fears is even remotely justified, nor could any of them be proven conclusively." Now that is irrefutable! And so he never refers to these "fears" again.

Instead he constructs an apology for immigration that omits whatever will cast any doubts on his desired conclusion. To that end, he also omits any mention of immigration's effects, not only on environmental issues, but also on questions of ethics, culture, social cohesion, political institutions, educational opportunities, welfare and other "entitlements," or the future.. And not until p.316, one page before the end of the book, does he even allow that some immigrants do fail or that a "Jamaican drug dealer can be found."

The significant reason for blaming Millman not only for what the book does but more importantly for what it does not do is that these major omissions half- or sixteenth-truths that, with authority and the semblance of truth, delude and

lead to grave errors.

Despite these major flaws, the book is a treasure because it is written with the openness and enthusiasm of a sophomoric cheerleader who baldly and boldly states his credo: people are commodities and the only criterion is monetary. This is stated clearly and unequivocally: "If the mother country is not a race or a tribe or a fixed territory, what is it? That's simple. America is an economy. More precisely, it is a market" (p.57). And on the next page the message is: "the newcomer

[can] add value to his assets" and "immigrant labor is the world's most traded commodity after petroleum.." All other issues are therefore ignored; and openly praised are all ways, including illegal ones, to make money. Thus, authentic data is supplied that his opponents can now cite without fear of being severely chastised or of being accused of making things up.

For example, although it is not indicated why, it is quite clear

that immigration apologists like Millman, while extolling America, have contempt for Americans, with American blacks treated with special disdain. Thus, we are offered a clear insight into the racism of immigration apologists who save their praise for only the newest immigrants while considering those whose ancestors arrived before 1965 "decadent cosmopolitans"<sup>1</sup> who live "smoggy, polluted lives"<sup>2</sup> and, like vampires, need a never-ending supply of "fresh blood"<sup>3</sup> to constantly renew their vitality. Millman amply shows this contempt with such statements as "the City University of New York foundered because of its open admissions" but "academically gifted immigrants bolstered it"; Haitians are "good" blacks because they are "reliable, energetic and willing to work cheap," in comparison, obviously, to the "bad" American-born

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**The Other Americans: How Immigrants Renew Our Country, Our Economy, and Our Values**

by Joel Millman

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*John Doe is...*

blacks who "seem drawn to crime and drugs instead of work."<sup>4</sup> Similar remarks are made explicitly throughout the book;<sup>5</sup> but the attitude is implicit constantly: since immigrants have succeeded and are succeeding and native Americans are not, but could if only they were as good as the immigrants. (The very arguable point that all these immigrants brought these opportunities with them will be referred to later.) And one key reason is that the immigrant family, when compared with the many divorced, dysfunctional and disintegrating families among native-born Americans, is the embodiment of an 'authentic' village culture."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the ploy of ignoring most of the issues, and all of the long-term ones, by focusing only, as the popular media loves to do, on selected "human interest" "success stories" serves to clarify this contempt. But an intriguing question is raised: since all of the disintegrating families are descended from immigrants who have been exposed to America for a longer period of time, why people who care about their children would WANT to bring them here and expose THEM to America's energy-sapping and corrupting influence is a mystery. I suppose the answer is that when these children mature, they will, in their turn, similarly need an infusion of "fresh blood" from a continuing supply of still-newer immigrants. And the beat goes on.

Another opportunity for opponents of apologists is Millman's romanticizing of crime and his encouraging people to obey only those laws they like and disdain any law that impedes their money-making.

Among the many illegal practices he applauds are:

piracy through the sale of "sure they're bootlegs! audio- and video-tapes; and unlicensed peddling;<sup>7</sup>

cheating customers by selling stolen or counterfeit goods such as "an imitation Rolex with no working parts" for \$20 when it was bought for only \$7 in New York's Chinatown;<sup>8</sup>

fraud, such as not being "shy about acquiring work authorization documents through fraud"<sup>9</sup> or selling Asian-made goods as authentic African ones;<sup>10</sup>

violation of housing regulations like zoning

ordinances and rental laws; and disregard of restricted land use;<sup>11</sup>

violation of hiring laws like equal opportunity regulations by use of "ethnic networking," which would be called "old-boy-ism" and "racial discrimination" if practiced by long-term American citizens but is "family loyalty" when practiced by immigrants;<sup>12</sup>

violation of labor laws like minimum wage laws, child labor laws (which becomes "using the family as a labor force" when done by immigrants) and work safety laws in sweatshops;<sup>13</sup>

tax evasion, which was illegal for Al Capone but approved (by Millman) for today's immigrants;<sup>14</sup> and of course

a total disregard for any law pertaining to immigration. For example, a new definition of "legal" is offered to defend visa overstayers ("they were here legally to begin with") and criminalizing illegal immigration is attacked, despite the fact that "illegal" means "against the law" and that is how a criminal act is defined.<sup>14</sup>

It is also nice to know that one Mexican town's access to a criminal smuggler gave them a "strategic advantage" over their neighbors, as having a pimp or a protection racketeer would do.<sup>15</sup> And the author provides a list of ethnically identified criminal businesses: a defense of "organizations like La Cosa Nostra [which] also protected the interests of the immigrants, even as they preyed on the community"<sup>16</sup> and the admission that "immigrant enclaves harbor criminal networks — Dominican cocaine rings, Chinese smugglers, Nigerian loan-fraud artists among them."<sup>17</sup>

And these crimes are shrugged off. But how many crimes does one criminal commit, only one? How many criminals are necessary to corrupt and control a neighborhood, to run a protection racket, to intimidate the law-abiding majority? Even this very partial list (excluding the Russian "mafia" and Colombian and Haitian drug dealers, for example) certainly indicates that criminality is common among immigrants. At what point does exploitation become cheating and cheating become stealing? At what point can the line be drawn? If protection

rackets are good business then why not straight-out burglary and robbery? And if "criminal enterprises (note the business term: they are *enterprises* not rackets) have always been part of the immigrant saga,"<sup>18</sup> does that mean that the importing and support of these practices should continue? Or should we, finally, try to get out of this perpetual cycle of immigration, crime, cheap labor and exploitation? How much is Millman willing to apologize for?

But perhaps he is praising these criminal practices because they renew our traditional values by further honoring the already revered methods by which many American fortunes were, have been, and are still being built. Obeisances to more crimes are always nice. "I'm sure they are much appreciated by the powers that be.

Millman also clearly demonstrates (and here a conjecture as to "why" is possible) that immigration apologists like him not only accept crime as part of the system, but enthuse over free market capitalism at its freest while at the same time disdaining democracy. Democracy in America is particularly scorned. He prefers to ignore every poll of the last two decades, all showing that the American people want immigration decreased. Just as Ben Wattenberg would like to dictate how many children each woman should bear, Millman would deny Americans the right to decide what kind of towns, cities, states and country they would like to live in, imposing his choices whether they like it or not. And he adamantly believes that only the newest immigrants have the right to maintain the culture they bring with them, while American citizens have no right to maintain theirs.

To do this, the author first claims that America has "no common culture" because its history does not stretch "back to caves or to tiny grains of prehistoric corn"<sup>19</sup> and because "it went to war to become Latin, absorbing half of Mexico before 1850" and also "became Asian [by] bringing Hawaii into its territory."<sup>20</sup> First, rare is the country that can pass the first test; and second, I'm relieved to learn, finally, the *real* reason for the Mexican War. Moreover, putting his own spin on historical interpretation and word definition does not change the fact that before 1700 the land now occupied by the both the U.S. and Mexico was mostly Indian, but neither country respected Indian culture enough to incorporate much of it into its own set of beliefs

and behaviors — its culture, the cultures of each are different, and noticeably so, and America's culture, as noted early by de Touqueville, was set in motion by people living on America's East Coast who were uninfluenced by either Mexico or Hawaii.

Millman must be aware of this for early on he boasts that "America is becoming everybody's second country ... as a symbol, an idea of the good life, of oomph and vitality and freedom and fun."<sup>21</sup> And he further demonstrates his keen awareness of what culture is by telling us what cultural artifacts are valued: "baseball games, porno movies, game shows" into Mexico,<sup>22</sup> "video games installed in Ipatinga bars" in Brazil, exactly what people in "desperate, grinding conditions" need,<sup>23</sup> and cockfights,<sup>24</sup> and "shirtless youths waving beer bottles and trailing a Brazilian flag"<sup>25</sup> into the United States.

He further praises share-cropping, where a farm-owning immigrant rents to a *compadre* who takes all the risks all the time while the owner takes only profits but no losses, the battle against Cesar Chavez' attempts to improve the migrant workers' pay scales and working conditions, the refusal to help newcomers, preferring instead to "recruit directly from [one's] home village," cheating workers who, because they are illegal, have no recourse despite the "truly awful abuses" that occur in the immigrant labor market."<sup>26</sup>

We are also welcoming people who, Millman reports, have "a fear and loathing of female liberation," and "slaves to commerce," who regard their "blackness" as "just one more vendor's trinket," who are paid to vote in their home country's elections, "presumably for the ruling party," who are racists, particularly anti-black racists, whose interpretation of "welcome the stranger" is to "meet the customer once, take his money, and not have to serve him again," and who agree to be exploited "within the willing context of apprenticeship," analogous, I suppose, to accepting child molestation or statutory rape as approved behavior if the youngster "agrees."<sup>27</sup> These descriptions of immigrants' behaviors, different from but in addition to the actual crimes cited above, ought to embarrass other immigration apologists; but they certainly enhance the reformers' position. I wonder, however, about the Americans Millman knows who gave him the cynical view that people who put business first, wife second, who sacrifice everything

for money or who are so willing to be exploited are the ones who are going to "renew our values."<sup>28</sup>

To further insure that the views and character of American citizens — who are all descendants of earlier immigrants, of course — are discredited, Millman resorts to the by-now-transparent ruse of immigration apologists: try to make the earlier arrivers look neurotic or biased. Thus, the apologists disingenuously try to deflect all discussion away from serious issues by projecting their own flagrant racism onto anyone who disputes them. He reveals his own attitude, for example, by stating that New York City replaced its "crime-prone population ... with a better class of *homo urbanus*,"<sup>29</sup> and by identifying all the people he writes about by their ethnicities.

But his deceptions are pathetically inept. For example, he coyly insinuates that Californians' objections to such large immigration flows are all anti-Latin and anti-Asian because seldom does the influx from elsewhere "generate controversy."<sup>30</sup> But he must know full well (or else he should not have written this book) that the number of Armenians, Irish, Jews and Slavs (to use his examples) who walk over the border every day to provide cheap labor, attend California's schools, have American babies or take over neighborhoods, cities and job opportunities is small compared to the numbers of Mexicans, other Latin-Americans and Asians who are entering. He might also know that some local issues are clear, like the violation of sanitation laws in Monterey Park, California or in New York City by Chinese restaurants who dump untreated waste into the streets, and some national issues, like people-smuggling and drug smuggling, are well reported, even in the biased media.<sup>31</sup> Such simple cuteness is attractive only to those who are glad to destroy his argument. I wonder why Millman found it so compelling.

Also, his depictions of other Americans are that Yankees are "uptight," Yuppies are "workaholics," people who try to protect their investments are "rednecks" and earlier immigrants are "bleary-eyed."<sup>32</sup> And he does his best to discredit American-born blacks. He ignores the fact that most of the 1960s civil rights battles were fought by American-born blacks, and that their major breakthrough was to change at least some American attitudes, laws and customs, and that they could have accomplished more were it not for

immigrant blacks taking advantage of and benefitting from their struggle, so that American-born blacks were never given full opportunity to feel assured of their ethnic pride. Thus, Millman's focus on the "successes" of today's black immigrants deliberately obscures the issue of why civil rights for blacks had to be fought for and allows the continuation of "blame the victim" rhetoric.

The "successes" Millman selects as models of behavior all seem to want to get as rich as possible as quickly as possible and create monopolies.<sup>33</sup> One investor buys a farm, makes his profits elsewhere so that he can keep prices down, and thus drives the other farmers to bankruptcy so that they must sell their land to "developers."<sup>34</sup> Others are hoteliers who build monopolies so that they can either provide all their own services (of course, immigrants create business, they do not drive others out) or force the remaining providers to bow to their wishes.<sup>35</sup> But once they have expanded, will there be opportunities for others? Or is immigration a gigantic pyramid scheme where the only loser is the future?

Millman's "happier is better" creed brings him delight when megamonopolies are created, like the one "swelling outward on a tide of Asian immigration."<sup>36</sup> Is that to be our model? Or is Miami, which has the highest percentage of immigrants of any large city in America<sup>37</sup> and which also, as Millman carefully omits, declared bankruptcy? Or perhaps Americans' demonstrated preference for smaller cities should be considered a course correction showing that the largest cities have already grown too much, that abandoned neighborhoods have outlived their usefulness and that Americans should have the right to choose to live in areas built to human size instead of monstrous size. They may not want wall-to-wall people; they may want the "open fields"<sup>38</sup> in old urban areas turned into parks or returned to nature; maybe they see that trees are not only timber, that animals are not only food and that land is not only money.

But Millman's only concern is money; and he does not see the connection between economic and ecological desolation that he himself points out: that an area "seared by drought" that produced "desperate, grinding conditions"<sup>39</sup> in Brazil caused migration into a city there and then into the U.S.; that "farmland is disappearing so quickly in parts of

Asia<sup>40</sup> that food will have to be imported (from where, if population growth continues, is not explained, since the question is not even asked); that "Mexican agriculture is even less productive now than before 1910";<sup>41</sup> that

Senegal has "creeping desertification" and pays farmers "to keep farming and stay out of bursting cities like Dakar."<sup>42</sup> He then admits that the U.S. has a self-perpetuating loss of farmland, since immigrant real estate operators need still more immigrants to sell the land to,<sup>43</sup> and that Florida has to "struggle for useable water."<sup>44</sup>

Southern California's need for water is, however, not mentioned. Nor is the fact that states from Texas to Idaho and even, periodically, New York and New Jersey, are finding that the supply of water is finite. Of course, none of this can be "proven conclusively" (even though it is included here), if no questions are asked. For example, do immigrants bring water with them? Has the "struggle for usable water" in Florida stopped now that more immigrants are settled there? And if the immigrant farmers are skilled enough to be successful here, why could they not farm in their home countries? Once asked, we will find that the "aboriginal"<sup>45</sup> Mexicans disappeared because their overuse of irrigation to feed too many people desertified their ancient land and that such ecological ruin is occurring even faster today and is causing even more distress and more immigration.

And Millman wants to quicken the pace of such devastation in the U.S. as well. His adoration of growth at any cost makes him not see that where "farmland has been bulldozed" so that housing can "blossom,"<sup>46</sup> nothing else can. Nevertheless, he wants megacities and strip malls and also "lush woods and meadows."<sup>47</sup> He exults in the growing number of family farms and also in farmers being compelled to sell "as development encroaches."<sup>48</sup> He never worries whether this can continue indefinitely or why we should want marginal land to turn to desert so that California will look like Mexico.<sup>49</sup> As long as short-term greed is satisfied, and some people are making money, he sees no conflict between farming and paving over land, as if land, like water, is also infinite.

Obviously Millman has learned nothing from the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. Instead, he glamorizes it, referring to a "scene" of "old jalopies" ... people eating twigs and "cheap chicken parts," sleeping on

cardboard and 'bathing' from a trickle of fresh water from a broken drinking fountain" under a "No Camping Sign" "near a stagnant creek" as "worthy of Steinbeck." Millman tries to beatify this shameful "scene" by saying that two fishermen, "sons, perhaps, of the Okies," were disgusted by the "stench," suggesting the precedent should always prevail. And he exalts the exploitation of immigrants by boasting that "the old days Steinbeck describes ... endure."<sup>50</sup> Clearly, then, we must perpetuate poverty and sustain degradation because they supply subject matter for books, movies and plays. There's compassion for you.

And just as clearly, precedent is sufficient reason for this to continue — indefinitely. So instead of determining which precedents are still worth following today, Millman believes that because all these things have happened before, we should continue:

to accept present immigrants if they come from the same countries as past ones;<sup>51</sup>

to praise "ethnic enclaves" (read: ghettos and slums);<sup>52</sup>

to skewer others as we were once skewered;<sup>53</sup>

to bring in more immigrants because Einstein was a genius;<sup>54</sup>

to calculate "rate" of immigration as if all percentages are the same number regardless of the size of the base;<sup>55</sup>

to do little to impede the influx;<sup>56</sup>

to celebrate "New York's return to its immigrant past,"

ignoring the treadmill of inadequate schools, housing, transportation and health care as well as large unemployment.<sup>57</sup> and

to tolerate indentured servitude for smuggled-in illegal aliens because slavery used to be a common practice.<sup>58</sup>

But if the existence of a precedent excuses everything, then we should bring back the Inquisition; but precedent is not enough.

Why, then, does Millman so fawningly apologize for immigration and desire its unending continuation? His answer is : cheap labor.<sup>59</sup> But how to guarantee an unending supply of immigrants who will "swell our bottom ranks"<sup>60</sup> and are only too happy to serve and smile and work cheap"<sup>61</sup> (and perhaps call him "Massa")? By depending — forever — on the world's misery to supplement our own already quite adequate pool of impoverished with a steady stream of hungry immigrants who will provide us with "fresh blood" and the "sweat and muscle" that we lack.<sup>62</sup> For the apologists cannot allow this pool to dry up. Rather, they must seek to sustain misery both here and abroad. Thus, they find improvement here unnecessary, since American misery is still better than most immigrants have at home. They don't even have to admit that things are bad, even for "unemployed inner-city teenagers" who have to "compete with full-grown adults who are hungrier."<sup>63</sup>

And whatever difficulties American-born blacks experienced could be said to be all their own fault. That is, the descent into desolation of various black neighborhoods would have no connection with the Great Depression of the 1930s, when unemployment was rampant, and the post-World War II scarcity of goods; or their persistent exclusion from the economic mainstream until after the 1960s, when immigrants, some willing to work for low pay and under poor condition while others, from the other end of the spectrum, had more business, educational and organizational skills, began to replace them in affirmative action programs, like getting "cheap minority business loans"<sup>64</sup> and thereby benefitting from the laws and relative openness that the civil rights battles had achieved, would have no connection with the current status of American-born blacks. And even now, blacks who want to discard the "victim" designation are given insufficient attention. Now, if we had continued from the 1960s, we might have fewer segregated "black neighborhoods" or other "ethnic enclaves" and we might have fewer "traditionally black"<sup>65</sup> jobs (because, after all, why should blacks clean "white houses"?<sup>66</sup>) and fewer hyphenated Americans. Thus, by bringing back, taking advantage of and intensifying the focus on ethnicity, immigrants have slowed social progress.

Apologists also find improvement abroad undesirable: reducing America's already

disproportionate use of developing countries' resources, either by conservation of or limiting our population size and thus the number of American over-consumers, would help developing countries; but restricting their improvement would serve us better. Millman explains how this works domestically. A neighborhood is allowed to get increasingly poorer until "renewing" it "becomes profitable."<sup>67</sup> This would apply to Brownsville, Brooklyn, which despite what Millman says about it, was already a slum — albeit a Jewish rather than a black one — when I was born there, on the very same Ralph Avenue he names, in 1929, as evidenced by Margaret Sanger's opening her clinic there to help people have no more children than they could adequately care for and by the volume of trade that resulted, not from well-being, as he alleges, but from many people living in crowded conditions. Its further decay produced even more misery and thereby yielded even more people willing to work cheap. Thus, its "renewal" was profitable; but it could have helped the previous residents and not the newest immigrants.<sup>68</sup>

For it is sleight-of-hand to suggest that immigrants either created or brought opportunities with them, since it is now known that innovation, not capital or labor, creates opportunities. America offered these opportunities (and the immigrants could have succeeded in their home countries if this were not the case) and Americans other than the newest immigrants could and should have benefitted from them., except where they could not compete with the foreign investors<sup>68</sup> (who were, of course, from the "huddled masses"). It is our failure, then, that immigrants are preferred: chosen first and given first choice.

Internationally it works, as Millman is pleased to admit, by having immigration function as a "safety valve" and a "brain drain" of people whose absence reduces oppressive governments' need to reform, "lets bad rulers perpetuate bad policy," supports Asian oppression, sustains a "slave system" in Senegal and allows some Senegalese to "impoverish the state but enrich themselves," and prolonged the killing in the civil war in El Salvador that was "funded by remittances from Salvadoran refugees."<sup>69</sup> All this to get "cheap, loyal (read: docile) labor" that gives an unfair advantage to unscrupulous employers who define exploitation as "productivity."<sup>70</sup>

Thus, Millman cheerfully lets us in on what the immigration apologist's case is built on: disdain for America's character, dismissal of democracy, defense of crime, distortions of both history and geography (and space limitations prevented mentioned of all there are), deification of unending growth, denial of valid concerns, and a desire that past ills go on and on. Certainly better arguments for immigration can be and have been made; but this book provides insight into how and what apologists think, so that other apologists may — and should — be embarrassed by it. And the disclaimer that no one book can deal with all the issues related to immigration and that this one won't even try is, first, untrue, and second, cannot begin to balance the extravagant claim made in the title.<sup>71</sup>

And his fatuous statements that stopping immigration is "next to impossible"<sup>72</sup> sound too much like the old sexist, cynical and senseless advice: "when rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it" that was offered to women before we knew that, in our culture, rape is about violence, not sex or breeding and certainly not love. So Millman tells us, at least eight times, to enjoy being made a colony of Asia,<sup>73</sup> to join the Mexican who regards the reconquest of America's Southwest as a laughing matter, to be as joyful as he is about Americans becoming extinct, forever replaced by new and newer immigrants and to rejoice in having the country's future made perilous because some people want short-term gains.

Well, most of us don't agree because we know that prevention has never been tried but could work: employer sanctions with fraud-resistant work authorization documents, keeping track of visa expiration dates, adequate border patrols to prevent entry and adequate funding of the INS, all the side issues that Millman dismisses so cavalierly, as he does with everything that offers contrary evidence.<sup>74</sup> In the race, then, between awareness and disaster Millman comes out solidly in favor of disaster; and to get us to follow him there, he tries to delude us with little things like saying that quality of life declines as population decreases instead of the other way around,<sup>75</sup> or like omitting any mention of how much stress is created and how much money is lost because of work/hours spent in traffic jams, or like never mentioning how many businesses, immigrant-run or not, fail — I could provide him a nice list just from a few blocks near where I live.

I am left with the conclusion that Millman celebrates what more sensible and caring people deplore. Or perhaps he is just following the advice of one of the immigrants he talks about: "You don't have to lie, you just don't tell everything."<sup>76</sup> **TSC**